

I was asked to submit comments on the Guidelines for Upgrade of Distance Learning Services. The STEP consortium was the first K-12 Distance Learning consortium in the state and our schools have benefited greatly from the support of the state and the technology advances that have occurred over the past 10 plus years. Our consortium was started in large part from grants obtained from the state and Federal government. The system was increased to 9 schools with another grant about 8 years ago. At that time the push was to be sure that all distance learning pods be built in such a fashion that they would be able to participate across lines with others.

Three years ago the state set a standard for what the minimum specifications would be so that in the future all distance learning systems would be able to compatible with one another. Again the state legislature in an attempt to be sure that this happened not only set a standard but helped to fund our consortium so that we would be in compliance with other distance learning systems across the state.

Since that time many of the systems have upgraded or are making plans for upgrade and now the standard is different again. I understand the need to watch the new technologies and to adopt that which is not only better, but is also more cost effective. Although I understand that philosophy and believe in it, it continues to baffle my mind that each time someone decides to upgrade the STEP system seems to get further and further behind. Each year we have schools that ask me why is it that other schools can interconnect be we can't. My response is and has been that because of differences in systems, it isn't possible. I am now getting schools asking why don't we just join another system. Frankly, I have no answers and from what I read in your request for input, I don't see us getting any closer with this proposal.

Again, I would tell you I have and continue to support the decisions made by this group, but it does not appear that the people making the decisions in this whole process are giving any consideration to those who are not currently a part of committees serving the NIT. I do not believe that it is in the far reaching interests of the entire state for some portions of the system to be left out of this process. Perhaps I have not paid close enough attention but it seems that more consideration needs to be given to all distance learning pods or by state mandate have one or two provide services to all of the rest.

As far as the transport is concerned, unless I'm not understanding the proposal, this will not benefit our system since we do not originate service at an ESU. I understand that transport from the Service unit will benefit us but a lot of our costs are prior to getting to a Service Unit connection. If this is the case, then again I guess we are the Step children left out in the dark once again. I thank you for listening to my concerns about this issue.

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